

History 367
SOURCES AND METHODS IN EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Reed College
Fall 2012
MW 3:10-4:30
Vollum 309

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Office hours: T 10-12; F 1:30-2:30
and by appointment, Vollum 124

"It is no consolation to be told by others that, because there are no written sources, no past can be recovered, as if living traces of that past were not part and parcel of daily life."
—Jan Vansina

"Slavery has never been represented; Slavery never can be represented."
—William Wells Brown

What do historians know about the early African American past, and how do they know it? This course explores major problems in African American historiography, including the relationship between the rise of slavery and the development of racial ideology; the nature of slave resistance, rebellion, and revolution; the transmission of African cultural forms and the creation of black culture(s); the social dynamics of the slave plantation; and the significance of regional differences in the historical experience of African Americans. We will study various historians' interpretations of these problems, as well as the primary sources that form the basis of those interpretations. The aim of the course is not to cover an exhaustive narrative of African American history. Still, by the end of the semester, you should be able to analyze major debates of interest to scholars of the period (c. 1619-1865), and you will be familiar with a number of influential primary and secondary works in the field.

Complementing its substantive focus on the early African American past, this is also a course on the nature of historical inquiry and historical representation. We will discuss what kinds of questions historians ask and why they ask them, what counts as historical evidence, how historians interpret different kinds of evidence, how they present their interpretations, and how they borrow from and contribute to scholarship in other disciplines. African American history is an excellent field in which to study these questions due to the methodological creativity of scholars in this field. In addition to their use of written texts, historians of early African Americans have also drawn on less traditional forms of historical evidence, such as DNA, demography, folklore, oral history, material artifacts, and human remains. Even when written documents are available, they rarely provide an unmediated perspective on the experience of people of African descent in early America. As a result, historians interested in early African Americans have developed innovative approaches to reading written sources. We will critically assess the possibilities and pitfalls of using these diverse sources and strategies to reconstruct the early African American experience, and you will have many opportunities to analyze and apply these methods yourself, both in class discussions and in written work.

Expectations and assignments

Honor principle

Reed's honor principle governs our conduct in this course in two ways:

- ***Respect for others.*** If you don't agree with what someone else has to say, you are welcome (and encouraged) to express your point of view, but you must do so respectfully, and you must support your claims with textual evidence.
- ***Intellectual honesty.*** I expect all work you do for this course to be your own. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, don't hesitate to ask. In your written work, please follow the Chicago Manual of Style for footnotes, not in-text citations. There is an abbreviated guide to Chicago style here:
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Conference attendance and participation

Because much of what you learn in this course will come out of the discussions you have with each other in conference, I pay careful attention to attendance. Missing more than three conferences or repeatedly coming late will put you at risk of failing the course. I expect you to come to conference on time and prepared to participate in discussion of the assigned readings. Participation includes both expressing your own ideas and questions and listening carefully to those of others. If you have concerns about speaking in conference, please come see me so that we can discuss ways to make participating in the discussion easier and more enjoyable for you.

Written assignments

You will receive detailed descriptions of all written assignments ahead of their due dates. Failure to complete all written assignments will put you at risk of failing the course.

- ***Five reading memos.*** These short papers will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on the readings prior to conference, and they will help to set the agenda for each day's discussion. 1-2 pages each; due once every two weeks, starting in the third week of the course. Memos should be posted to Moodle by 11 a.m. on the day of the conference at which the readings will be discussed.
- ***Preliminary paper.*** Early in the semester, you will write a brief paper assessing our readings on the slave trade. 2-3 pages; due in class on Wednesday, September 5.
- ***Midterm paper.*** This paper will require you to assess the readings we will do over the first half of the semester, with a focus on the historiography of agency, culture, and resistance, which we will cover in weeks 3-7. 5-6 pages; due in Vollum 124 by 5 p.m. on Friday, October 12.
- ***Final paper.*** The final project will give you an opportunity to design your own research paper based on primary sources or to draft a proposal for a museum exhibit concerning early African American history. 10-12 pages; due Monday, December 10,

by 5 p.m. in Vollum 124. Prior to the final deadline, there are two preparatory assignments for the final paper, a proposal due by 8 p.m. on Friday, November 2, via email, and a partial draft of 5-6 pages due by 3 p.m. on Monday, November 26, via email.

Policy on late work

Because I have sequenced reading and writing assignments carefully, failure to complete assignments on time will be detrimental to your progress in the course. I will consider requests for extensions, but they must come in writing (i.e. via email) at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline. Your email should include an explanation of your request and a proposed alternative deadline. I reserve the right to refuse any request for an extension, as well as to refuse to accept any work that comes in after the deadline. Please be aware that in most cases, I will write minimal comments on late papers and will take the extra time into account in determining the paper's grade. *I will grant no extensions on reading memos or final paper drafts, as these assignments will be circulated to other students prior to discussion in class.*

Reading

These required books are on order at the bookstore and on reserve at the library:

- a) Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- b) Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Signet, 2002).
- c) Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976).
- d) Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
- e) Carla L. Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
- f) Mark M. Smith, ed., *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005).

We will also be reading a substantial amount from the following book for our class on November 19. Because this book is quite expensive, and because the required assignment amounts to less than half of it, I have not ordered it through the bookstore. There are multiple copies on reserve at the library, and used copies are available online.

- a) Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Aside from a few books that you'll have to get from library reserve, the remaining readings are available electronically, through online journals, public websites, or the course e-reserves; the appropriate site or link is accessible via the Moodle syllabus (log

on to moodle.reed.edu and go to History 367). Note for JSTOR items: if hyperlinks on article titles do not work, try clicking on the hyperlink for the journal title instead and navigate to the article from there. *Because we will be analyzing texts closely in class, it is imperative that you bring the readings (either digitally or in hard copy) to class.*

We will also be viewing and discussing two documentary films: *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness* and *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*. If you are unable to attend the group showings of these films (to be scheduled), DVDs of each of them are also available on reserve in the Instructional Media Center.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: What is history?

M 8/27 No sources, no history?

- a) Bring to class three sources that could be useful to someone writing a biography of you.

W 8/29 Difficult history

- a) Wendy Anne Warren, “[“The Cause of Her Grief”: The Rape of a Slave in Early New England](#),” *Journal of American History* 93.4 (2007): 1031-1049. [Oxford Journals]
- b) Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 1-31.
- c) W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Propaganda of History,” in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935; rpt. New York: Free Press, 1998), 711-729. [e-reserves]
- d) Excerpt from Sam Wineburg, “Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts,” in *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 22-24. [e-reserves]

Week 2: The slave trade

M 9/3 No class – Labor Day

W 9/5 “Graphs and tables and balance sheets”

- a) Philip D. Curtin, “The Slave Trade and the Numbers Game: A Review of the Literature,” in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 3-14. [e-reserves]
- b) David Eltis, “[“The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment](#),” *William and Mary Quarterly* 58.1 (2001): 17-46. [JSTOR]
- c) Excerpts from Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1931), 1-2, 8-12, 14-15, 26-27. [e-reserves]
- d) Stephanie E. Smallwood, “The Anomalous Intimacies of the Slave Cargo,” in *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 101-121. [e-reserves]

- e) Marcus Rediker, introduction to *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007), 1-13. [e-reserves]

PRELIMINARY PAPER DUE at the beginning of class.

Week 3: Piecing together the past

M 9/10 Going against the grain

- a) [Slave laws from Virginia Colony](#), Virtual Jamestown website.
- b) Virginia records in Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1926), 76-93 (you can skip the introduction to the documents). [e-reserves]
- c) Kathleen M. Brown, "Engendering Racial Difference, 1640-1670," in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 107-136. [library reserve]

W 9/12 Excavating culture

- a) Cheryl J. LaRoche and Michael L. Blakey, "Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground," *Historical Archaeology* 31.3 (1997): 84-106. [e-reserves]
- b) Mark E. Mack and Michael L. Blakey, "The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities," *Historical Archaeology* 38.1 (2004): 10-17. [e-reserves]
- c) Erik R. Seeman, "[Reassessing the 'Sankofa Symbol' in New York's African Burial Ground](#)," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67.1 (2010): 101-122. [JSTOR]
- d) Photographs of items excavated at the African Burial Ground available via the website "[Africans in the Americas: Celebrating the Ancestral Heritage](#)" (click on "Explore the African Burial Ground").
- e) Film: *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness*, prod. Llewellyn Smith, Vincent Brown, and Christine Herbes-Sommers, 57 min., Vital Pictures and ITVS, 2009 (out-of-class viewing to be arranged).

Week 4: Material history

M 9/17 The difference geography made

- a) Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 1-45, 58-65, 101-124, 143-147, 175-194.

W 9/19 Culture as resistance

- a) Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, xv-xxiv, 257-284, 498-519, 530-560, 580-609.

Week 5: Plantation worlds I

M 9/24 Unthinkable history

- a) Smith, *Stono*: read all of Part I (1-56) and your choice of two essays in Part II.

W 9/26 The worlds the slaves made

- a) Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 209-284, 327-365.

Week 6: Plantation worlds II

M 10/1 The allure of paternalism

- a) Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 1-7, 25-70, 585-660.

W 10/3 Rethinking resistance

- a) Walter Johnson, "[A Nettlesome Classic Turns Twenty-Five](#)," *Common-place* 1.4 (2001).
b) Walter Johnson, "[On Agency](#)," *Journal of Social History* 37.1 (2003): 113-124. [JSTOR]
c) Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 1-59.

Week 7: Plantation worlds III

M 10/8 Space, gender, and the power of the quotidian

- a) Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 60-141.
b) Isabel Wilkerson, "[A First Time for Everything](#)," *New York Times*, 22 Dec. 2011.

W 10/10 Whose voice matters?

- a) Memoirs of [Madison Hemings](#) and [Israel Jefferson](#) (1873) from the *Pike County Republican*.
b) Annette Gordon-Reed, "'The Memories of a Few Negroes': Rescuing America's Future at Monticello," in *Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture*, ed. Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 236-252. [e-reserves]
c) *WMQ* Forum: "[Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings Redux](#)," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56.4 (1999): 121-152, 171-182. Read contributions from Jan Lewis, Joseph Ellis, Lucia Stanton, and Annette Gordon-Reed. [JSTOR]

Optional supplementary readings:

- d) Eric S. Lander and Joseph J. Ellis, "[Founding Father](#)," *Nature* 369 (5 Nov. 1998): 13-14.
e) Eugene A. Foster et al., "[Jefferson Fathered Slave's Last Child](#)," *Nature* 369 (5 Nov. 1998): 27-28.
f) David Waldstreicher, "[Beyond Biography, Through Biography, Toward an Integrated History](#)," *Reviews in American History* 37.2 (2009). (Review of Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello*.)

F 10/12 MIDTERM PAPER DUE at 5 p.m., Volumn 124.

10/13-10/21 FALL BREAK

Week 8: From resistance to rebellion

M 10/22 The trials of Denmark Vesey

- a) WMQ Forum: "[The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, Part 1](#)": Robert A. Gross, introduction, and Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *William and Mary Quarterly* 58.4 (2001): 913-976. [JSTOR]
- b) WMQ Forum: "[The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, Part 2](#)": responses to Johnson, in *William and Mary Quarterly* 59.1 (2002): 135-202. [JSTOR]
- c) James O'Neil Spady, "[Power and Confession: On the Credibility of the Earliest Reports of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy](#)," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68.2 (2011): 287-304. [JSTOR]

W 10/24 Nat Turner in history and memory

- a) [The Confessions of Nat Turner](#), as told to Thomas R. Gray (Baltimore, 1831).
- b) Kenneth S. Greenberg, "Name, Face, Body," in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-23. [e-reserves]
- c) Anthony Santoro, "[The Prophet in His Own Words: Nat Turner's Biblical Construction](#)," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116.2 (2008): 114-149. [JSTOR]
- d) Film: *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, dir. Charles Burnett, prod. Frank Christopher and Kenneth S. Greenberg, 60 min., ITVS, 2002.

Week 9: Narrating slavery and freedom I

M 10/29 Reading, writing, and becoming a man

- a) Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, in Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, 323-436.

W 10/31 Narrative, authenticity, and representation

- a) John Sekora, "[Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative](#)," *Callaloo* 32 (1987): 482-515. [JSTOR]
- b) Robert S. Levine, "[The Slave Narrative and the Revolutionary Tradition of American Autobiography](#)," in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99-114. [Cambridge Collections Online]
- c) Ann Fabian, "Slaves," in *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 79-116. [library reserve]

F 11/2 FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL due via email by 8 p.m.

Week 10: Narrating slavery and freedom II

M 11/5 The bonds of womanhood

- a) Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, 437-578.

W 11/7 Where does Harriet Jacobs belong?

- a) Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives*, 579-668.

Week 11: Looking North I**M 11/12 Forming urban communities**

- a) Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 35-146.

W 11/14 Imagining community

- a) Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 147-222.
- b) Browse at least two issues of [Freedom's Journal online](#). Aim to get a sense of the kind of material included in the first African American newspaper. What issues did the editors think were important to their readers? What sort of "imagined community" did this newspaper constitute? Bring your notes to class.
- c) Browse at least two issues of another African American newspaper via the Accessible Archives database. Access the site via the Reed Library's [databases page](#). Once in Accessible Archives, click "Browse the Archives" (on the far right of the screen, near the first search box). This will bring you to a list of titles in the entire Accessible Archives collection. Choose any of the titles labeled "African American newspapers," and click "Issues" next to that title. This will take you to a list of issues by date. You do not need to read all the items in a given issue, but again, try to get a sense of the range of material covered in the paper. Also, try doing a full-text search of the collection. Click "search" to take you to the original search screen, type a word or phrase you wish to search in the box at top, and make sure "African American newspapers" (or an individual newspaper title) is selected in the "Source" box. Bring to class your notes, as well as copies of any particularly interesting newspaper items that you find. Again, consider the nature of the "imagined community" (or communities) constituted by these newspapers.

Week 12: Looking North II**M 11/19 The African American public sphere**

- a) Robert Alexander Young, "Ethiopian Manifesto" (1829); William Hamilton, "Address to the National Convention of 1834" (1834); Maria W. Stewart, "Productions" (1835); David Ruggles, "New York Committee of Vigilance..." (1837); Henry Highland Garnet, "Address to the Slaves..." (1843/1848); "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People" (1847); "Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention..." (1848); Alexander Crummell, "The English Language in Liberia" (1861), in *Pamphlets of Protest*, ed. Newman, Rael, and Lapsansky, 84-89, 110-113, 122-130, 144-189, 282-303.

W 11/21 No class – Make up 12/5**11/22-11/25 THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Week 13: The personal and the political

M 11/26 Family history as American history

- a) Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 223-309, 385-393.
- b) Rachel L. Swarns and Jodi Kantor, "[In First Lady's Roots, a Complex Path from Slavery](#)," *New York Times*, 7 Oct. 2009.
- c) Rachel L. Swarns, "[Meet Your Cousin, the First Lady: A Family Story, Long Hidden](#)," *New York Times*, 16 June 2012.

Optional supplementary reading:

- d) Rachel L. Swarns, "[The First Family: A First Glimpse of Michelle Obama's White Ancestors](#)," *New York Times*, 22 June 2012.

FINAL PAPER DRAFTS due by 3 p.m., via email, to me and your peer readers.

W 11/28 Research roundtable

- a) Read final paper drafts, as assigned.

Week 14: History and memory

M 12/3 Remembering slavery

- a) Norman R. Yetman, "[The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection](#)," *American Quarterly* 19.3 (1967): 534-553. [JSTOR]
- b) [WPA ex-slave narratives](#), University of Virginia American Studies Hypertexts website. Read interviews with Fountain Hughes and at least two others.
- c) John Blassingame, "[Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems](#)," *Journal of Southern History* 41.4 (1975): 473-492. [JSTOR]
- d) Edward E. Baptist, "'Stol' and Fetched Here': Enslaved Migration, Ex-slave Narratives, and Vernacular History," in *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, ed. Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 243-274. [e-reserves]

W 12/5 The history we want and the history we've got

- a) Nell Irvin Painter, "[Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known](#)," *Journal of American History* 81.2 (1994): 461-492. [JSTOR]
- b) Tera Hunter, "[Putting an Antebellum Myth about Slave Families to Rest](#)," *New York Times*, 2 Aug. 2011.
- c) David W. Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: New Press, 2006), 19-33. [e-reserves]

M 12/10 FINAL PAPER DUE at 5 p.m., Volumn 124.